

VZCZCXRO8366
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHAK #0279/01 0511745
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 201745Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8856
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3288
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 5415
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000279

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/19/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR MIDDLE EAST SPECIAL ENVOY GEORGE MITCHELL'S TRIP TO TURKEY

Classified By: Ambassador James Jeffrey for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (S) Turkish officials, including President Gul and FM Babacan, have worked assiduously to walk back remarks by PM Erdogan that were extremely critical of Israel during the Gaza crisis, repair the traditionally strong Turkish-Israeli relationship, and assuage fears in Washington and European capitals that Turkey has abandoned its Western orientation. Turkey's MFA has ascribed Erdogan's though talk to internal politics, pointing to nation-wide local elections that will take place March 29, campaigning for which is gearing up. IDF attacks on civilians dominated the Turkish press for weeks in December/January and remain fresh in the minds of most Turks as you arrive. Erdogan was particularly incensed that Israel launched attacks on Gaza 1) just days after PM Olmert had visited Ankara with no mention of Israeli thinking and 2) just as GOT officials believed they were close securing a fifth meeting with the Syrians and Israelis. The PM's reference to Israeli strikes as "crimes against humanity" reflected the depth of his anger, rebounding later in his heated outburst at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The GOT says it has turned its attention now to seeking a common approach among its Arab neighbors to helping establish intra-Palestinian rapprochement. Turkish officials will see your visit as an opportunity to establish ties with the new administration, to share their views on regional issues, and, more problematic, as U.S. validation that Turkey has a role to play in the Middle East peace process.

KEY POINTS TO RAISE

12. (S) During your meetings with President Gul, PM Erdogan, and FM Babacan, I suggest you focus on the following key points:

- TURKEY AND THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS: As an Annapolis partner, Turkey has played an important role in Middle East peace process and Lebanon. We look forward to continued partnership in the future. (para 5);
- TURKEY-ISRAEL RELATIONS: Turkey's relations with Israel are important to regional efforts to achieve peace and central to Turkey's utility as a key regional actor. Don't jeopardize them. Inflammatory rhetoric or actions that could jeopardize Turkey's relationship with Israel will undercut Turkey's ability to play a role. (para 6);
- HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO GAZA: We appreciate Turkey's efforts to ease the suffering of the Palestinian people and to promote economic development. We applaud Turkey's decision to participate in the Egyptian-hosted Gaza

Reconstruction Conference in Sharm al-Sheikh and to send FM Babacan as Turkey's representative. We also want to ensure access to humanitarian assistance in Gaza, but with the focus on the Palestinian Authority. (para 7);

- HAMAS: The USG continues to support Quartet conditions on HAMAS, namely that it recognize Israel, renounce violence, and adhere to past agreements. To accept Hamas into the process without these conditions undercuts the legitimate PA leadership. We applaud recent GOT statements of support for the PA and the visits of Mahmoud Abbas and Hosni Mubarak to Ankara in early February. (para 8);

- ISRAEL/SYRIA TALKS: If Israel is in agreement, we hope that Turkey will once again return to facilitating communication between Tel Aviv and Damascus when the conditions are right. (para 9)

WATCH OUT FOR

13. (S) The Turks will very likely raise:

- HAMAS AS A LEGITIMATE POPULAR MOVEMENT: The Turks may argue that HAMAS is a political force with popular legitimacy and, to achieve peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, the West will have to deal with HAMAS, whether it accepts Quartet conditions or not.

- DISPROPORTIONATE ISRAELI OPERATIONS IN GAZA: Civilian

ANKARA 00000279 002 OF 003

casualties in Gaza resonated strongly with the Turkish people and the GOT. You should brief the Turks -- who joined the UNSC on January 1 -- on U.S. plans for the March 2 Gaza reconstruction conference and what we are prepared to do to maintain the peace.

- ISRAEL/SYRIA TALKS: The Bush administration expressed support for the Israel/Syria talks without committing to eventual U.S. participation. Although the talks have stalled due to the Gaza crisis, GOT officials may push you to make a stronger statement of support or a commitment for greater U.S. participation.

BACKGROUND

14. (C) Turkey is a NATO ally and European Union accession state that works with us on many key U.S. priorities -- Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, energy security, Pakistan, the Balkans, and Georgia -- in addition to the Middle East peace process. Under the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the GOT has endeavored to improve relations with its broader neighborhood, particularly in the Middle East. This has led Turkey to proctor indirect talks between Israel/Syria and facilitate increased Afghan/Pakistan cooperation, as well as secure a non-permanent seat on the UNSC for 2009-2010. Erdogan's Oval Office meeting in November 2007, and our sharing of actionable intelligence on the presence of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in the border area of northern Iraq that followed, marked a major positive turning point in US-Turkey relations. Turkey itself has experienced a tumultuous year of economic, social and political upheaval. PM Erdogan is focused on the upcoming March 2009 local elections, which the AKP has turned into a referendum of sorts on its governance at the national level. Electoral politics has made Erdogan reluctant to pursue some EU accession-related reforms and more apt to lash out on populist issues, such as Gaza.

TURKEY AND THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

15. (S) Citing the Israel/Palestine conflict as the root cause

of regional instability and the main leverage point for Turkey's rival Iran to gain power and prestige, the GOT has endeavored to play a constructive role in the Middle East peace process, including attempting to "flip" Syria from its Iranian axis. Turkey participated in and has subsequently supported the Annapolis Conference through participation in the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and elsewhere. Turkey has sought greater leverage in Damascus and has taken a role as facilitator, passing information between the SARG and regional capitals. PM Erdogan and GOT officials played a notable role in striking the deal that led to consensus on Michel Sleiman assuming the presidency in Lebanon. Turkey is a vital partner in multiple aspects of our Iraq engagement (Kurds, Sunnis, and the fight against the PKK). During the Gaza crisis, PM Erdogan traveled to Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt in an attempt to help coalesce a consolidated Arab position. The problem is that Erdogan's pandering to public sentiment, his own Islamic orientation, and a general Turkish tendency to view "talking with everybody" as a substitute for real actions and decisions have painted Turkey seemingly into a corner: more tilting towards Syria and HAMAS than to Israel and the moderate Arab states. Turks generally are uncomfortable, as they know the negative effect of this on their crucial relations with the U.S., and will want to better coordinate with us.

TURKEY-ISRAEL RELATIONS

16. (C) Turkey and Israel have traditionally enjoyed strong ties. While the political relationship ebbs and flows depending on Israeli actions in the Palestinian territories, strong military and growing economic ties anchor the two nations in turbulent times. Although Turkey routinely votes the OIC position in the UNGA, the GOT has played a role in moderating anti-Israeli rhetoric in the organization's statements. Despite his inflammatory condemnation of Israeli acts in Gaza, PM Erdogan has refused to concede to opposition demands that Turkey sever or downgrade its ties. Behind the scenes, the Turkish bureaucracy is diligently working to keep

ANKARA 00000279 003 OF 003

the lines of communication open between Tel Aviv and Ankara. Unfortunately, PM Erdogan's heated statements at the World Economic Forum in Davos and Israeli Land Forces Commander Major General Mizrahi's recent criticism of Turkey has stalled any public rapprochement

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO GAZA

17. (C) Turkey has a long-standing relationship with the Palestinian Authority. Since 1995, the GOT has donated over USD 30 million to Palestine, including development, health, education, security, and agricultural assistance. The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) opened a branch in Ramallah in May 2005. Turkey has also worked to develop sustainable economic development in Palestinian territories through such programs as the Ankara Forum for Economic Cooperation Between Palestine, Israel, and Turkey; qualified industrial zone (QIZ) projects; and the construction of a Peace University on the Israel/West Bank border. During concurrent visits to Ankara, PA President Abbas and Israeli President Peres addressed the Turkish Grand National Assembly in November 2007, the first time an Israeli leader addressed a predominantly-Muslim parliament. The Turkish Red Crescent -- as well as numerous other Turkish groups -- have organized donation drives for humanitarian assistance in Gaza. FM Babacan will attend the Egyptian-hosted Gaza Reconstruction Conference in Sharm al-Sheikh.

HAMAS

18. (C) The GOT maintains open lines of communication with

both Fatah and HAMAS. Following harsh international and domestic criticism for hosting HAMAS leader Khaled Meshal in February 2006, the GOT has kept its dealings with the group out of the public eye, with Turkish leaders meeting HAMAS under the guise of party representatives instead of government officials. Most recently, Senior HAMAS spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri visited Istanbul, January 17. During the Gaza Crisis, Turkey advocated for HAMAS' inclusion in the negotiations, going as far as PM Erdogan publicly stating that Turkey would act as a voice for HAMAS at the UNSC. His Senior Foreign Policy Advisor Ahmet Davutoglu conducted shuttle diplomacy between Cairo and Damascus, passing information from Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman and HAMAS leadership.

ISRAEL/SYRIA TALKS

19. (S) The GOT has hosted four rounds of indirect talks between Syria and Israel in Istanbul. The Turks have repeatedly told us that the talks cannot be finalized without an active U.S. role. Despite Turkey's urging to move forward, Tel Aviv and Damascus unofficially put the talks on hold when Kadima's coalition government fell apart in September 2008; following the Gaza crisis, the SARG and GOT officially suspended its efforts. Erdogan feels that both sides were within days of agreeing to a fifth round, this time direct talks, when the Gaza attack began.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turkey>

Jeffrey